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SUBJECT: TURKEY: AFTER FOURS YEARS, THE STATUS OF THE TOXIC
CARGO OF THE MV ULLA HAS BEEN SOLVED - IT SANK

[1](#)1. SUMMARY: After nearly four years in which Turkish officials avoided confronting the problem, the Spanish ship MV Ulla, moored in Iskenderun harbor and loaded with 2.2 tons of ash laden with toxic heavy metals, sank just days before it was scheduled to depart for Spain. Environmental NGOs' led by Greenpeace and the captain of the ship had warned Turkish authorities that the risk of the ship sinking was were very high. Following the sinking, Turkey's Forestry and Environment Ministry banned fishing in the area and is analyzing the damage to prepare for removing the toxic waste and mitigating environmental damage. Who will pay has not been decided. End Summary.

A LONG PROCESS THAT DEGRADES THE VESSEL

[1](#)2. The Spanish cargo ship, MV ULLA, was stuck in legal limbo for four years as Spain and Turkey argued over who should take responsibility for the hazardous cargo and local Turkish officials insisted on payment for port services - and according to the press, some bribes. The long delay meant that the ship was increasingly unsafe. It finally sank this week in the Turkish Mediterranean port of Iskenderun, with its 2.2 tons of toxic fly ash cargo.

[1](#)3. The issue started in 2000 when MV ULLA, loaded with fly ash from Spanish coal-fired power plants, arrived at Turkey's Mediterranean port of Iskenderun after Algeria turned away the cargo, which was intended as filler in a construction project. Scientific analysis of the cargo revealed that the waste contained levels of chromium exceeding the legal standards set by Turkish law. Importation of such hazardous waste in Turkey is banned under the Basel Convention, which governs - and severely restricts - transboundary movements of hazardous wastes.

[1](#)4. Turkish officials fined the ship and asked Spain to take back "MV ULLA" and the hazardous waste on board. Turkey also asked the assistance of the Basel Convention Secretariat to find a solution for this issue. To avoid any

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damage to the sea and coastal environment, the Turkish Environment Ministry (MOEF) asked the local court to keep the ship in the port of Iskenderun until the Spanish government agreed to accept the ship. In the meantime the Turkish ship agent Mavi Sea Transportation Co. asked the court to sequester the ship until it received compensation for its losses.

COULD IT BE A SABOTAGE, ASKS THE TURKISH MINISTER

[1](#)5. As news of the September 6 sinking hit the press, Environment and Forestry Minister Osman Pepe said that Spain and Turkey had recently reached an agreement that would have returned the vessel to Spain in just a few days. He voiced his suspicion that because the ship sank right before its scheduled departure, it might have been the result of sabotage. The press reported that Pepe asked Spain to pay compensation for the damage and the clean-up. According to recent press articles, Spanish officials offered help to Turkey to cope with the pollution.

[1](#)6. The Deputy Governor of Hatay (the province where Iskenderun is located) Cafer Odabasi rejected the allegations for of sabotage on the grounds that the sinking of the vessel was normal after staying four years at sea. The ship's captain said he had warned authorities over three months ago of the dangerous situation, and a Greenpeace official told us the group had repeatedly warned officials about the degraded state of the vessel, and that it posed an immediate risk of marine contamination.

RESULT: THE MARINE LIFE THAT SUFFERS

17. The extend extentof the damage to the local environment and the cost of the clean up are not known. The ship is completely submerged, but it is not known whether the ship is broken up and to what extent the cargo has escaped.

18. Environmental NGOs, headed by Greenpeace Mediterranean, Environment Protection Association, and Eastern Mediterranean Environment Associations, protested the slow bureaucracy and diplomatic actions and requested that the area to be cleaned-up immediately through cooperation with Spanish authorities. Greenpeace Mediterranean Toxic Wastes Campaign Director Banu Dokmecibasi said both Turkish and Spanish governments were warned about the bad conditions under which the vessel was waiting and the possibility of sinking. She said the governments did not consider this a serious issue.

19. A Turkish MFA official told Embassy Environmental Specialist that it became the responsibility of the MOEF after the vessel sank. The official said that a crisis desk had been established in the MOEF in order to carry out the necessary biological and chemical analysis and on-site investigations. The extent of the harm will be identified and the appropriate mitigation measures will then be determined on the basis of the findings. The official also said MOEF banned fishing and water sports around the sunken vessel.

110. Around 10,000 people in the region who depend on the sea to make a living will suffer the immediate impact of the accident. The long-range damage to the environment and human health are not known. Greenpeace Mediterranean Toxic Wastes Campaign Director Banu Dokmecibasi said fly ash contained chromium (Cr+6), which is a heavy metal that causes cancer and harms marine life. The press reported that 80 years would be needed to erase all traces of damage to the environment.

IS TURKEY SEEN AS THE TOXIC WASTE DISPOSAL POINT?

11. COMMENT: MV ULLA is not the only toxic waste problem that GOT is struggling with. Embassy's Regional Environmental Office reported the cases of Italian toxic barrels on the Black Sea shores and Sea Beirut several times in the past. Unfortunately, no solid steps to solve these problems can be reported at the moment. End comment.

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